

Exploring 1 & 2 Thessalonians

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PREFACE

Following Jesus and leaving former beliefs is surely not an easy thing. For some, it means bringing persecution on themselves. This happened to the Thessalonians who became Christians. Yet their faith in Christ was firm. They turned away from worshiping idols to worshiping and serving the true God. Paul exhorted them to walk in a manner worthy of God, who saved them from sin and darkness, and called them to his kingdom and glory. In the first letter, Paul taught them how to live their lives as Christians: how to walk in faithfulness, worthiness, fruitfulness, holiness, and hope. In the second letter, Paul taught them to have faith in the Lord in everyday life, anticipating for his return and trusting him for their destiny.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

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Lesson 1 – Walking in Faithfulness

1 Thessalonians was written about 50-51 A.D. by the Apostle Paul to the church of the Thessalonian Christians in the city of Thessalonica. Thessalonica was about 50 miles from Mount Olympus—which according to the Greek mythology was the dwelling place of the gods. Thessalonica was heavily influenced by this belief and the Thessalonians worshipped these idols. Acts 17:1-9 tells us that Paul and his team went to Thessalonica and shared the gospel of Christ to the Thessalonians. Many Thessalonians believed in Jesus Christ. As a result, a church was established.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul began his letter by greeting the Thessalonian Christians (v.1). He stated the relationship between them—as a church—and the Triune God. The Triune God is one God in three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. The members of the Trinity are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. As a church, the Thessalonian Christians are *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. As Christians, their personal relationship with the Triune God is the center of their new identity.

What does it mean when we say that Jesus Christ is the Lord?

Are there any other lords in your life other than Jesus?

What is grace? What is peace? Why are they important in the Christian life?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

What did Paul say to God when praying for the Thessalonian Christians?

Prayer is significant in the Christian life. It is a means of our communication with God. A mark of growing Christians is that they constantly pray for others. They pray not only for themselves, but also for others. They try to think about other Christians' work of faith and labor of love. When we think about others' faith and love for Christ, it brings a desire to praise and give thanks to God in our prayers. Consequently, we receive spiritual joy in our hearts from God. We also become more God-centered and others-oriented in our thinking and prayers, as opposed to self-centered and self-oriented. Giving thanks to God, praising him, and remembering other Christians' work of faith and love in our prayers will develop spiritual joy in us and make us grow in spiritual maturity as Christians.

In this lesson, we will learn seven characteristics of Christians who walk in faithfulness exemplified by the Thessalonian Christians. The first three characteristics are in verse 3: (1) they work their faith, (2) they labor their *agape* love—unconditional love, (3) they are steadfast in their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are there any proofs of your work of faith and *agape* love as Christians that others can tell?

Being steadfast in our hope in Jesus Christ will create patience and perseverance in us. It strengthens our faith in times of struggle and suffering. Christ, as our Lord and Shepherd, will shepherd us and make sure that we lack nothing in him (Psalm 23:1). He will supply all our needs.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

Verse 4 tells us that Christians are those who are loved (*agape*) and have been chosen by God. God has chosen to save us simply because he loves us. This is his grace for us that we do not deserve. Our salvation is the work of God in our lives. When we hear the gospel and are convicted, it is because the power of the Holy Spirit works in us (v.5). We can repent from our sins, turn to God, and put our faith in Jesus Christ because the Holy Spirit brings conviction in our hearts and gives us the gift of faith. Without the internal work of the Holy Spirit in us, no matter how many times we hear the gospel, our hearts will not be convicted. We are spiritually dead in sins and separated from God (Ephesians 2:1). Only after the Holy Spirit regenerates our souls and gives us faith, can we be convicted, repent from our sins, turn to God, and put our faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering our lives to him.

The Thessalonians experienced the power of the Holy Spirit with full conviction (v.4). Their work of faith demonstrated their genuine faith in Christ. True Christians produce the fruit of faith in their lives.

How fruitful are you as Christians?

The fourth characteristic of Christians who walk in faithfulness is they imitate Christ (v.6). The Thessalonian Christians became imitators following the example of the apostles and of the Lord. They “received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” They received God’s Word with joy even though they faced much affliction and suffering. They chose to be faithful and obey God regardless of much affliction. When they chose to follow Jesus, they became a minority group living in the community of people whose beliefs they had abandoned. Consequently, the Thessalonian Christians experienced persecution from the community and the authorities. Forms of persecution they received included verbal, emotional, physical, or a combination of these.

Often times, Christians choose the comfort of this world rather than being faithful and obedient to God’s Word.

Are there any areas of your lives that you would choose to disobey God rather than losing the comfort of this world? Is there anything more important than being faithful to God?

The fifth characteristic of Christians who walk in faithfulness is they become examples for other Christians (v.7). As a church, the Thessalonian Christians became examples for other Christians in the province of Macedonia and the neighboring province of Achaia. Their faithfulness to Christ was known by other Christians (v.8).

Can other Christians regard you as an example of a faithful Christian?

How can we help one another to be faithful Christians?

The sixth characteristic of Christians who walk in faithfulness is they serve the true and living God rather than idols (v.9). The Thessalonians had turned to the true God from idols—the false gods of Greek mythology. Spiritually speaking, an idol is anything that is more important to us than God or anything in which we put our meaning or purpose of life rather than in God.

What kinds of idols do many Christians fall into and become unfaithful to God?

The seventh characteristic of Christians who walk in faithfulness is they wait patiently for the return of Christ (v.10). The Thessalonian Christians endured much affliction, but they were steadfast in their faith and hope in Christ. They waited with much patience for Christ to return. When Christ returns, he will end all our sufferings. He will destroy death and make all things right. He will bring us to a new heaven and earth. It is in this hope many suffering Christians remain faithful, persevere, and wait eagerly for Christ to return.

Has your faithfulness to Christ ever been tested?

Are you eagerly waiting for Christ to return?

Key Points to Remember

- Remember to pray for other Christians and give thanks to God for their faith and their work of faith and love.

- Remember the seven characteristics of Christians who walk in faithfulness:
 1. They work their faith.
 2. They labor their *agape* love—unconditional love.
 3. They are steadfast in their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 4. They imitate Christ.
 5. They become examples for other Christians.
 6. They serve the true and living God rather than idols.
 7. They wait patiently for the return of Christ.

Lesson 2 – Walking in Worthiness

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 for review.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

Before going to the city of Thessalonica, Paul and Silas went to the city of Philippi (see Acts 16) and shared the gospel there. As a result, a church was planted in Philippi. There was a slave girl possessed by a demon, whom Paul cast out of her. The owners of the slave girl were not happy. They dragged Paul and Silas to the market place and created a mob accusing Paul and Silas for disturbing the city. The mob attacked them. The authorities came and beat Paul and Silas before the mob, and threw them into prison. That was why Paul said that they had been shamefully treated at Philippi (v.2).

After being released from the prison, Paul and Silas went to the city of Thessalonica to share the gospel and planted a church. Paul said that “our coming to you was not in vain” (v.1).

Why is the work of the gospel never going to be in vain?

Paul says in Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” This is why the work of the gospel is never going to be in vain, because the power of God accompanies the work of the gospel. The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people, leading them to believe and put their faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering their lives to him.

In this lesson, we will learn several characteristics of Christians who walk in worthiness. The first characteristic is they are bold to share the gospel of God (v.2).

Why boldness is necessary to share the gospel and how do we get boldness?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:3-12

The second characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they speak with honesty (v.3). When Paul shared the gospel, he did so with honesty. He did not attempt to deceive people.

Why is honesty important in gospel ministry?

Many Christians often times have a good intention to bring people to Christ, but their approach is unwise and dishonest. They lack spiritual discernment.

The third characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they seek to please God and not man (v.4). Paul did not do gospel ministry with words of flattery, nor did he seek glory from people, because he understood that God would test our hearts (v.4-6). God sees our thoughts and the motives of our hearts behind our words and actions. We sin against God in our thoughts, words, and actions. We tend to act or say words in ways to please other people around us more than adoring and pleasing God.

How often do we adore God in our prayers? How often do we do things to simply please him?

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”(Psalm 139:23-24).

The fourth characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they are gentle and affectionate (v.7-8). Paul and Silas were gentle to the Thessalonian Christians like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. When a nursing mother takes care of her own children, she does it with much gentleness and affection. Her *agape* love for her children is displayed in her gentle and affectionate behaviors. One way for us to grow in gentleness and affection is to learn how to shepherd another Christian.

Are there any Christians whom you can shepherd and show gentleness and affection?

The fifth characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they willingly sacrifice themselves for other Christians (v.8). Paul and Silas were ready to *share themselves* with the Thessalonian Christians. They were ready to share the burdens and troubles that the Thessalonian Christians experienced. When there are Christian brothers and sisters who are having difficulty, we have to be ready to share their burdens, even if it means sacrificing our time, energy, and other resources.

Are there any Christian brothers and sisters who need your help now?

How do we grow in sharing and sacrificing for one another's burdens?

The sixth characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they work hard for the gospel ministry (v.9). Paul worked as a tent maker to support his life while conducting gospel ministry. Paul's hard work is a good example particularly for those who are in full-time ministry and generally for all Christians. As Christians, we need to be intentional in sharing the gospel to non-Christians around us. We need to be intentional to pray for those whom God brings to our lives and to seek opportunities to share Christ with them.

How often do you intentionally prepare to share Christ with a friend?

What can help us to be more intentional to share the gospel?

The seventh characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they are holy, righteous, and blameless in their conduct (v.10). Righteous means we have right dealings with other people. Blameless means we are above reproach and no one can accuse us of being wrong. It means we keep a good reputation as Christians. People watch our words and actions in order to accuse us. Christians are literally called *saints*, holy people of God. We are to devote all areas of our lives to God alone.

Are there any areas of your life that you are reluctant to devote to God?

Can non-Christians speak well about you?

The eighth characteristic of Christians who walk in worthiness is they always encourage other Christians (v.12). Paul exhorted, encouraged, and charged the Thessalonian Christians to walk in a manner worthy of God. He did this to all Christians to whom he wrote his letters .

What does it mean *to walk in a manner worthy of God*?

How does it challenge your Christian life?

Key Points to Remember

- Remember the work of the gospel is never going to be in vain.

- Remember the eight characteristics of Christians who walk in worthiness:
 1. They are bold to share the gospel of God.
 2. They speak with honesty.
 3. They seek to please God and not man.
 4. They are gentle and affectionate.
 5. They sacrifice themselves for other Christians.
 6. They work hard for the gospel ministry.
 7. They are holy, righteous, and blameless in their conduct
 8. They always encourage other Christians.

Lesson 3 – Walking in Fruitfulness

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 for review.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

In this lesson, we will learn several characteristics of Christians who walk in fruitfulness. The first characteristic is they constantly thank God for his word that brings salvation to people. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). In his prayers, Paul constantly thanked God for the Thessalonian Christians who received his message to them not merely as the word of men—the word of Paul—but as what it really is, the word of God (v.13). Paul was aware that God was working through him and the other apostles to reveal the word of God.

In whom is the word of God at work (v.13)?

The word of God is a divine message and effectually works in believers through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens our minds to understand his word. He is the one who gives us the gift of faith, enabling us to believe in the gospel. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we will not be able to believe the Bible and the gospel message. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Thessalonian Christians became imitators of other Christians in Judea—the Jewish land (v.14). They suffered persecution from other Thessalonians, just as the Jewish Christians suffered persecution from other Jews. The non-believer Jews persecuted and killed the prophets and Jesus. They also drove out many of the apostles and other Christians to leave the Jewish land (v.15).

What else did the non-believer Jews do to Paul and his missionary companions (v.16)?

The second characteristic of Christians who walk in fruitfulness is they persevere in the midst of persecution. Christians who persevere in the midst of persecution will be fruitful Christians. God will use their perseverance to bring significant blessings for many others.

Have you experienced some sorts of persecution either physically, verbally, or emotionally, because you are a Christian?

Have other Christians been encouraged by your perseverance in the midst of persecution?

How can we help one another to persevere?

Romans 5:3-5 "... but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

The non-believer Jews, who persecuted Christians and attempted to hinder the Gentiles from hearing the gospel, were filling up their own sins (v.16). The wrath and judgment of God was upon them. Either through the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans, or through other ways of God's punishing them, his judgment upon them would certainly come.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Because of the persecution, Paul and Silas had to leave the city of Thessalonica and went to the city of Berea (Acts 17:10). They were sorrowful for being separated from the Thessalonian Christians (v.17). Paul and Silas tried to see them again, but Satan hindered them (v.18).

How do you think Satan hindered them?

The Thessalonian Christians were the fruits of Paul's ministry. They became Christians as a result of Paul's missionary journey. They were his glory and joy (v.20).

The third characteristic of Christians who walk in fruitfulness is they regularly share the gospel of Christ with others. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were good examples of Christians who walk in fruitfulness.

Jesus has given us the Great Commission to share the gospel and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Part of our sanctification and growing in spiritual maturity is being obedient to the Lord's command to share the gospel regularly. If we do not do this, we will be unfruitful and ineffective Christians.

Have you learned how to share the gospel?

When was the last time you shared the gospel?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Paul and Silas left Thessalonica for Berea. The Jews, who opposed them in Thessalonica, pursued and went to Berea, preventing them from sharing the gospel there. These Jews stirred up the crowd to persecute Paul. The Christians tried to save Paul and brought him to Athens (Acts 17:10-15). Concerned for the faith of the Thessalonian church, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica.

The fourth characteristic of Christians who walk in fruitfulness is they genuinely take care of other Christians. Paul was genuinely concerned about the Thessalonian young believers and attempted to take care of them. Because Paul was unable to go back to Thessalonica, he sent Timothy in his place.

What was Timothy's responsibility (v.2)?

How was he supposed to do that?

Persecution and suffering is part of the Christian life (v.3-4). Jesus never promises that his followers will live a comfortable life as Christians. Paul told Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). The devil does not like us following Jesus. He will use the world to give us temptations and persecution.

Paul was concerned that the Thessalonian young believers would be tempted and become unfaithful to God (v.5). Timothy was sent to shepherd these young believers. Likewise, it is necessary for us to shepherd new Christians.

Have you ever shepherded a new Christian? If yes, please share your experience.

Are there any new Christians you know of? If yes, how can you help strengthen their faith in Christ and their love for him?

Key Points to Remember

- Remember persecution and suffering is part of the Christian life.
- Remember the four characteristics of Christians who walk in fruitfulness:
 1. They constantly thank God for his word that brings salvation to people.
 2. They persevere in the midst of persecution.
 3. They regularly share the gospel of Christ to others.
 4. They genuinely take care of other Christians.

Lesson 4 – Walking in Holiness

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5 for review.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

In the previous lesson, we learned that Paul sent Timothy to establish and exhort the Thessalonian Christians in their faith (3:2). After staying for a while in Thessalonica, Timothy went back to Paul to bring a report about the Thessalonian Christians.

What did Timothy tell Paul about the Thessalonian Christians (v.6)?

How did the report impact Paul (v.7)?

Paul constantly faced persecution and affliction wherever he went to share the gospel. He was always concerned about the new Christians, because he truly loved them. Knowing that the Thessalonian Christians were growing well in their faith and love for Christ, Paul was comforted. The news gave him joy.

How did the report impact Paul's prayer to God (v.9-10)?

In this lesson, we will learn several characteristics of Christians who walk in holiness. The first characteristic is they pray day and night. Paul prayed day and night (v.10). Praying *day and night* means praying all the time during the day and the night of each day. Like Paul, we are to pray without ceasing, praising God and bringing petitions to him.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

What did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonian Christians (v.12)?

The work of faith and love of the Thessalonian Christians was already known by other Christians in the province of Macedonia and the neighboring province of Achaia (1:3, 7). Paul prayed for their work of faith and love to increase and abound even more.

What else did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonian Christians (v.13)?

God is working in each Christian to make him/her holy and blameless. This is Christian sanctification—the work of God's free grace renewing us completely after the image of God, enabling us more and more to die to sin and to live to righteousness. God's work of sanctifying us begins when we repent and put our faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering our lives to him. God will complete our sanctification when Christ returns. "And I am sure of this, that he [God] who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Are there any Christian brothers or sisters whom you admire for their godly life?

How can we strengthen one another to live a holy and blameless life?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

What did Paul ask the Thessalonian Christians to do (v.1)?

The second characteristic of Christians who walk in holiness is they continuously try to please God more and more. There is a growing understanding that they are far from perfection to please God, and there is a growing conviction that they need to please and glorify God more and more in all areas of their lives.

What is the will of God for all Christians (v.3)?

We are to obey God and pursue holiness as he sanctifies us.

What do we have to do (v.3)?

What else do we have to do (v.4-5)?

What else do we have to do (v.6)?

Sexual affairs with a married person will not only affect the sinners, but also their spouses, their family members, and other Christians in the church.

What does it mean by *the Lord is an avenger in all these things* (v.6)?

God has called us to live in holiness and not in impurity (v.7). Committing adultery is disregarding and despising God's command (v.8). Adultery is a heinous sin that God forbids in the Ten Commandments. Christians who refuse to repent from adultery indicate that they may not be born-again Christians. All born-again Christians will desire to grow in holiness and will repent when the Holy Spirit convicts them.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

What did Paul ask the Thessalonian Christians to do (v.9-10)?

Paul previously mentioned that he asked God to increase and abound their love for one another (3:11). Now, he urged them to demonstrate acts of love for one another more and more.

The third characteristic of Christians who walk in holiness is they continuously grow in their love for other Christians. Their acts of love are regularly demonstrated and received by other Christians.

Have you ever been encouraged by a Christian brother or sister?

Are you growing in love for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Why?

When was the last time you showed your love to other Christians? What did you do?

How can we help one another to grow in love? Are there any things that need to be done soon?

What else did Paul ask the Thessalonian Christians to do (v.11)?

What was the reason (v.12)?

As Christians, we are to live quietly and peacefully with others. We are called to be the light of God in our community. Our lives should impact non-believers around us and draw them to Christ. We should be examples on how to work diligently, live peacefully and honorably, and be blessings to the community. Jesus says, "You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14, 16).

How can we individually and corporately impact the non-believers around us?

Key Points to Remember

- Remember that God sanctifies us and will make our sanctification complete.
- Remember the three characteristics of Christians who walk in holiness:
 1. They pray day and night.
 2. They continuously try to please God more and more.
 3. They continuously grow in their love for other Christians.

Lesson 5 – Walking in Hope

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6—4:12 for review.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Some of the Thessalonian Christians had apparently died. Those who were alive grieved for the dead Christians. They were confused and uninformed about the matter of Christian death and the return of Christ. They wondered if those who had died, since they would not see the return of Christ, would also miss entering the kingdom of Christ. Paul attempted to explain this matter to them. He did not want them to grieve like those who did not believe in God would grieve. Paul wanted to assure them that they did not need to grieve without hope (v.13). The life and the death of Christians are full of hope in Christ.

What will happen to Christians who die before Christ returns (v.14, 16)?

When Christ returns, he will resurrect his people who have died and will give them a new body. This new body is a glorious and heavenly body, not born through a physical sexual union between a man and a woman, but created by Christ supernaturally. This new body is the same as the resurrected body of Christ. It is without sin and corruption. It is holy and perfect to live in heaven with God.

When Christians die, our souls return to God. “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection” (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 37). When Christ returns, he will give our souls glorified bodies.

How will Christ return (v.16)?

Christ is the Creator and the Commander of the universe. He will descend from heaven and his cry of command will give attention to every living creature in the physical world and spiritual world. Christ’s command calmed a furious storm (Mark 4:35-41). Nature listens to his command. His command brought Lazarus back from the grave (John 11:1-44).

The voice of an archangel—a commander of angels—will command angels to accompany Christ’s glorious return, and the trumpet of God will be sounded. The glorious return of Christ will bring awe to all living creatures. It will bring great joy to those belong to him, but to those who reject him, it will bring a great and dreadful fear.

What will happen to Christians who are still alive when Christ returns (v.17)?

Christ will also renew and glorify the body of Christians who are still alive. They will be given heavenly bodies and be brought up to the air. There will be a glorious reunion of all Christians in the air. Christ will reunite and glorify all Christians as one people with him. We will meet our loved ones again and all our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the hope and the joy of Christians. We come to believe in Christ at different times and die at different times, but Christ will reunite us all to meet with him in the air.

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

What happen after we meet the Lord in the air (v.17)?

Revelation 21:3-4 “... Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

What did Paul ask the Thessalonian Christians to do concerning this matter (v.18)?

Our anticipation for the return of the Lord brings a great hope and a great encouragement to us. Christian hope is not uncertain but is an assurance. It is promised and guaranteed by God himself. “And I am sure of this, that he [God] who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

In this lesson, we will learn several characteristics of Christians who walk in hope. The first characteristic is they wait eagerly for the future return of Christ, and their faith in him is strengthened by this hope.

Are you encouraged by the future return of Christ?

How are we supposed to live our lives in the light of Christ’s return?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

The day of the Lord is the day of Christ’s return. Many Christians want to know precisely when Christ will return and some are too curious about it. Jesus’ disciples also asked him this question, and he simply answered them that he will return unexpectedly. Paul describes Christ’s return like a thief in the night and like labor pains come upon a pregnant woman (v.2-3). Jesus wants us to focus on our sanctification and be ready at any moments for his return.

How will those who reject Christ experience his return? What will happen to them (v.3)?

Christ currently gives people time to repent from their sins. When he returns, the time to repent is up. He will bring judgment to those who reject him. It will be the day of their destruction.

What does it mean that Christians are not *of the night* or *of the darkness*, but *are all children of light* (v.4-5)?

Christians are neither *in* the darkness nor *of* the darkness. We neither live in the darkness, nor belong to the darkness. We live in the light and belong to the light. We are of God.

What does it mean that we should *keep awake and be sober* (v.6)?

The second characteristic of Christians who walk in hope is they keep themselves alert and sober against sin and temptations. We have daily spiritual battles against our enemies: our sinful nature, this sinful world, and the devil and his demons. As soldiers of Christ, we need armors to win our daily spiritual battles. Our spiritual breastplate is faith and love, and our spiritual helmet is the hope of salvation (v.8). Breastplate is to protect our hearts. Our faith and love for Christ will keep our hearts strong and will protect them from being corrupted. Helmet is to protect our minds. The hope for our glorification and being with Christ for eternity will keep our minds focus on Christ and will protect them from being distracted.

In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul teaches the whole armor of God that we need to put on in order to win our daily spiritual battles. Our spiritual sword to defeat our enemies is the Word of God. We need to study the Word of God daily and let it saturates our minds and hearts.

What practical acts can we do to encourage and build one another up concerning our daily spiritual battles and our salvation in Christ (v.9-11)?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

How should our attitudes be towards our church ministers (v.12-13a)?

Church ministers are to be respected, because not only the Lord has given them authority over us, but they also work hard to shepherd their church members. The work of shepherding God's people requires sacrifice and hard work. Therefore, church members are to respect and esteem them very highly in love.

How should our attitudes be towards one another (v.13b-15)?

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are in a covenant family of Christ. We are to love and build one another up in Christ. We are to do this with much patience and be willing to sacrifice.

How should our attitudes be towards God (v.16-22)?

God is the God of peace and the source of peace (v.23). We constantly need peace from God in order to keep walking in hope and be faithful. When difficulties come and our faith is tested, we need more peace. God will provide us with abundant peace by his grace. He will guide and shepherd us. He will sanctify us completely and keep us blameless until the end of our lives. God is faithful and will surely do this to us (v.24). God has made a covenant relationship with us. He will keep his covenant promise to love us and be faithful to us for eternity. Our God is a faithful God.

The third characteristic of Christians who walk in hope is they put all their hope in the faithful God who will sanctify and keep them blameless completely.

Key Points to Remember

- Remember that Christ will give us new glorified and heavenly bodies when he returns. Then, we will always be with him for eternity.

- Remember the three characteristics of Christians who walk in hope:
 1. They wait eagerly for the future return of Christ, and their faith in him is strengthened by this hope.
 2. They keep themselves alert and sober against sin and temptations.
 3. They put all their hope in the faithful God who will sanctify and keep them blameless completely.

Lesson 6 – Faith in the Lord during Affliction

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28 for review.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, Paul explained that the return of Christ would be sudden and unexpected. Apparently some of the Thessalonian Christians misunderstood Paul. They thought Paul was indicating that the return of Christ would be in a very short time, such as in a few weeks. They got confused. Some of them quit their job and were simply waiting for Christ to return. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians a few months after writing 1 Thessalonians. He wrote 2 Thessalonians with the purpose of clarifying to the Thessalonian Christians some of their misunderstandings about the return of Christ and to encourage them to be faithful to Christ while waiting for his return.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Where do grace and peace come from (v.2)?

What did Paul give thanks to God for (v.3)?

The Thessalonian church was a good church. Their faith and love became a good example to other churches.

What practical acts can we do to abundantly grow our faith and love?

The Thessalonian Christians also demonstrated steadfastness during persecutions and afflictions (v.4). Steadfastness means that we do not become passive and weak when facing persecutions or afflictions, instead we demonstrate strength and faithfulness in Christ in the midst of struggles. There is spiritual strength that the Lord gives us, along with grace and peace.

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him” (Psalm 28:7).

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

Persecution that Christians receive from non-believers is evidence of the righteous judgment of God (v.5). Those who persecute Christians show their evil and sinful acts against God. When Christ returns, he will judge all people. There will be a righteous judgment by a righteous God toward all sin and evil.

Why is suffering for Christ an evidence that we are *worthy of the kingdom of God* (v.5)?

What will God do to those who afflict Christians (v.6)?

What will God do to Christians who have been afflicted (v.7)?

In 1 Thessalonians 4, we learn about the glory of the return of Christ. Here in verse 8, we learn that Christ will return in *flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God*—those who do not have a personal relationship with God—and *those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*—those who do not believe in the gospel. This flaming fire is a metaphor for the wrath of his righteous judgment.

What will happen to them (v.9)?

The glory of God's might means the goodness of God, including all things he has created. God is the source of all goodness and we receive his goodness daily, such as the air, the sun, etc. At the end, those who reject God will be separated from his goodness completely. Hell is the place where those who reject God will never experience his goodness for eternity. They will be completely cut off and separated from any good things created by God. At the end, those who keep rejecting God will be rejected by God forever.

What does it mean that Christ will be glorified in his saints (v.10)?

Christians are sinners who have been forgiven for their sins by God's grace. We are imperfect now, but Christ is perfecting us. Our beliefs and faith in him bring glory to him. When he returns, he will reveal his glory to us and will be glorified in us. We will marvel at him, because of who he is and his love for us. We are sinners who have been considered worthy by God to receive his grace and calling to be his saints (v.11).

How are we supposed to live our lives worthy of God's calling?

We will never be able to be perfect in obeying God. We will make mistakes, but God will perfect us. He will fulfill and make complete *every good purpose* and *every work of faith*. God has called us that we should be holy and blameless, and he will complete his work in us. "And I am sure of this, that he [God] who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Christ will be glorified in us and we will be glorified in him (v.12). Our covenant union with Christ is inseparable. What Christ has, we have it all in him. His holiness, righteousness, and glory is ours.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3).

Key Points to Remember

- Remember that suffering for Christ is an evidence that we are worthy of his kingdom.
- Remember that God will complete every good purpose and every work of faith.
- Christ will be glorified in us and we will be glorified in him.

Lesson 7 – Faith in the Lord for His Return

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 for review.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Paul explained about the return of Christ and the gathering of believers—those who have passed away and those who are still alive—to meet with Christ in the air. This gathering or the rapture of believers in the air will happen when Christ returns with his glory. The gathering of the believers and the return of Christ are not two separate events, but one event.

What did Paul ask the Thessalonian Christians to be careful of (v.2-3a)?

The day of the Lord refers to the day of Christ's return (v.2). Apparently, there were false teachers spreading false teaching that Christ had returned. These false teachers claimed that (1) a spirit had revealed this to them, or (2) they received special revelation from God, or (3) they received a letter from Paul. However, Paul explained that neither of these was true. These false teachers caused some of the Thessalonian Christians to be troubled in mind. Paul explained to the Thessalonian Christians that there would be certain events before Christ's return.

What will happen before Christ's return (v.3b)?

People's rebellion against God occurs every day. The rebellion here refers to a world-wide rebellion against God. This is also known as *the great apostasy*; a world-wide rejection against God. This great rebellion will be led by *the man of lawlessness*—a man who is against God's ordained law. He will lead people in total rebellion against God. He is *the son of destruction*, because his own destruction is certain. Christ will completely destroy him when he returns. The Bible tells us that there are many false teachers and antichrists in this world. This particular *man of lawlessness* is *the great antichrist*. Unlike the other antichrists, he will cause the greatest rebellion against God.

What will this man do (v.4)?

This great antichrist is currently being restrained. However, his mysterious work of lawlessness is already at work in people's lives (v.6-7). It is not clear to us about the person who restrains the antichrist and how he restrains him. For sure, he must be very powerful to restrain the antichrist. He can be a very powerful angel or the Holy Spirit, whose work is often times behind the scenes. He will be *out of the way* and step aside, letting the antichrist be revealed and appear publicly to do his final evil works for a period of time before Christ returns (v.8).

What will Jesus do to the antichrist when he returns (v.8)?

The day of Christ's return is *the Judgment Day*, when Christ will judge all people and all the rebellious angels—the devil and his demons. Christ will judge and destroy the antichrist and his master, the devil.

What will the antichrist do when he appears (v.9-10)?

False signs and wonders of the antichrist are deceptive. The antichrist will bring “great things” to the world. These can include economic prosperity, peace between nations, or greater freedom. Most likely his *signs and wonders* are great works that many people do not expect. Never before there is a great world leader like him. People will thank, appreciate, and follow him. They will not be able to identify that the things he does are deceptive and are meant to lead them to reject God and follow Satan. Satan will give him great power to carry on his final acts against God. People will be blind of the reality of his spiritual deception, until Christ returns to end the work of Satan and the antichrist and to destroy them.

Who will follow and believe in the antichrist (v.10)?

Those who are perishing are those who reject God and refuse the truth of God. They will follow the antichrist instead of God. They will perish, because Christ will certainly punish and destroy them along with the antichrist. For Christ’s people, he will protect them from being deceived. Christians will suffer tremendously during the time of the antichrist, but Christ will be with them and strengthen them. If they die, their souls will immediately return to him, free from suffering. They will be with Christ in heaven for eternity and enjoy the heavenly blessings.

Why will God send *a strong delusion* to those who reject him (v.11-12)?

Sending a strong delusion is one way of God punishing those who reject him. God magnifies their unbelieving and rebellious hearts against him, and their desires for sin, unrighteousness, and lawlessness. Those who reject God will be condemned by their own acts. God hardens their hearts, so that their sin and condemnation is affirmed. Those who reject God will be rejected by him forever at the end.

Key Points to Remember

- Be aware of the growing sinfulness in our societies. Satan continues to deceive people and lead them to reject God from their lives.
- Be careful not to follow the course of this sinful world. Stand firm in your faith.
- Grow in your personal and intimate relationship with Jesus.

Lesson 8 – Faith in the Lord for Our Destiny

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 for review.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

What did Paul say about the Thessalonian Christians (v.13)?

The Thessalonian Christians were the first fruits, meaning the first group of people who became Christians as a result of the apostles' gospel ministry, not long after the resurrection and the ascension of Christ.

What is God's purpose of calling us to be saved in Christ (v.14)?

Verses 13-14 describe the doctrine of salvation, which includes the doctrine of election, effectual calling, faith, sanctification, and glorification. Our salvation is the work of the Triune God—God the Father, God the Son [Jesus Christ], and God the Holy Spirit. There are five truths concerning Christian salvation.

1. We are beloved by the Lord Jesus Christ (v.13). The word *beloved* has the root of the Greek word *agape*, which means unconditional love. It means that Christ loves us with unconditional love.
2. We are chosen by God to be saved (v.13). We were dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), and the Holy Spirit brought us to life spiritually (Ephesians 2:5). He gave us the gift of faith, so that we can believe in Christ, trusting and surrendering our lives to him. God has chosen us to be saved in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).
3. We are chosen by God through sanctification by the Holy Spirit (v.13). Sanctification is the work of God's free grace renewing us completely after the image of God, enabling us more and more to die to sin and to live to righteousness. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us making us more and more holy. The Holy Spirit, who has brought us alive from death in sin and who has given us the gift of faith to believe in Christ, continues to work in us, sanctifying us.
4. We are chosen by God through belief in the truth (v.13). To believe in the truth of God is something we cannot do on our own. The Holy Spirit must help us. He brought us alive, enlightened our minds, and opened our hearts to believe in the gospel. The Holy Spirit continues to guide and nourish us with the word of God. The word of God is the truth of God, by which we are sanctified. Jesus says to the Father concerning Christians, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).
5. We are chosen by God to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (v.14). When Christ returns, we will be glorified in him. We will be made in complete holiness after the image of Christ. This is the result of our union with him. Christ will also share with us all his heavenly glory—all things he has.

What did Paul advise the Thessalonian Christians to do (v.15)?

To *stand firm* refers to standing firm in our faith, and *hold to the traditions* refers to holding to the teachings of God's word.

Why is it necessary for us to stand firm in our faith and to hold to the word of God?

What does it mean that Christ and God the Father give us *eternal comfort and good hope through grace* (v.16)?

What does it mean that Christ and God the Father will establish us *in every good work and word* (v.17)?

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

What prayer request did Paul ask from the Thessalonian Christians (v.1-2)?

To *speed ahead* means to spread quickly. Paul wanted the word of the Lord—the gospel—to spread quickly and be received by many people. Not all people will honor and believe in the gospel. Not all people will have faith in Christ. Many will reject the gospel and even persecute the messengers. Paul asked for prayer that God would protect him and his missionary companions from wicked and evil men.

What does it mean that the Lord Jesus Christ is faithful (v.3)?

What will he do to us (v.3)?

Who is the evil one (v.3)?

Christ is faithful to his people, even though we are not always faithful to him. We are in a covenant relationship with him. He will always love and be faithful to us. He is our covenant Shepherd and Lord.

Paul had confidence that the Thessalonian Christians would be faithful to Christ (v.4). However, Paul's confidence was in Christ, and not in the Thessalonian Christians. They would make mistakes, but Christ would continue to guide and sanctify them.

Who can help us to *direct our hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ* (v.5)?

Even our faithfulness to Christ is his grace for us. We cannot be faithful to him, unless he helps us to be so.

Key Points to Remember

- Our Triune God, who has chosen us to be saved in Christ, will make our salvation complete.
- Christ is our covenant Shepherd and Lord. He is always faithful to us. Trust in him!

Lesson 9 – Faith in the Lord for Doing Good

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5 for review.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

What did Paul command the Thessalonian Christians to do (v.6)?

Apparently, there were lazy Christians in the Thessalonian church. They did not walk according to the teaching of God’s word—*the tradition* that Paul taught them. In other words, they lived in disobedience to God’s word. They were lazy to work to get income and buy food. They simply depended on other Christians to give them food. They abused the idea that Christians were to love and support one another. They became a burden for other Christians and a problem in the church.

Paul commanded the Thessalonian Christians to keep away from those Christians who lived in idleness and in disobedience to God’s word. A command is an order and not a request. Paul’s authority came from Christ. He asked the Thessalonian church to obey this command. To *keep away* means to stay away or have no fellowship with. This is a form of church discipline to the disobedient church members.

There are three purposes of church discipline: (1) the glory of God, (2) the purity of the church, and (3) the repentance and restoration of the disobedient sinners.

Paul asked the Thessalonian church leaders to take action and lead the congregation to solve the problem. God’s name needs to be glorified and honored by people inside and outside the church. The church needs to maintain its purity. The disobedient sinners need to repent from their sins and be obedient to God.

The early church met regularly for fellowship at members’ homes and usually with a fellowship meal. The lazy Christians abused these meetings to get free food. Paul commanded the Thessalonian Christians not to invite their lazy brothers to their fellowship meetings, so that they could feel ashamed and repent from their sin.

How did Paul himself set a good example as a Christian who worked hard (v.7-10)?

Paul worked as a tent-maker, making and selling tents to support his living. Now, the term *tent-maker* becomes known to describe those who are in a Christian ministry and have to work to support themselves, because they do not get enough financial support.

What does it mean that the lazy Thessalonian Christians were *not busy at work, but busybodies* (v.11)?

What was Paul’s command to them (v.12)?

What did Paul encourage the Thessalonian Christians to do (v.13)?

How or when do we grow weary in doing what is good and right?

What does it mean that we keep trusting God and continue to do what is good and right?

Disciplining a disobedient Christian brother is not easy and usually brings stress. Things will get even more difficult if the person refuses to repent and continues to sin. Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians to keep doing what was good and right and not grow weary, even though it was difficult and stressful. We need to have faith in the Lord, who is the Good Shepherd for all his people.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

How should we treat a disobedient Christian brother (v.15)?

What is the difference?

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

This was Paul’s benediction to the Thessalonian church. Benediction means an expression of a blessing.

What was Paul’s blessing to the Thessalonian church (v.16, 18)?

In chapter 2, Paul mentioned that false teachers might claim that they had letters from Paul or they might write letters using his name. Here, Paul showed that his closing greeting or benediction at the end of the letter was his style of writing a letter (v.17).

Key Points to Remember

- Be a good Christian and set a good example for other Christians.
- Keep your faith in the Lord who is the Good Shepherd for all his people.
- Whatever you do in the Lord will not be in vain.

Resources

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